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THE QUEST OF THE IDEAL

GRACE RHYS

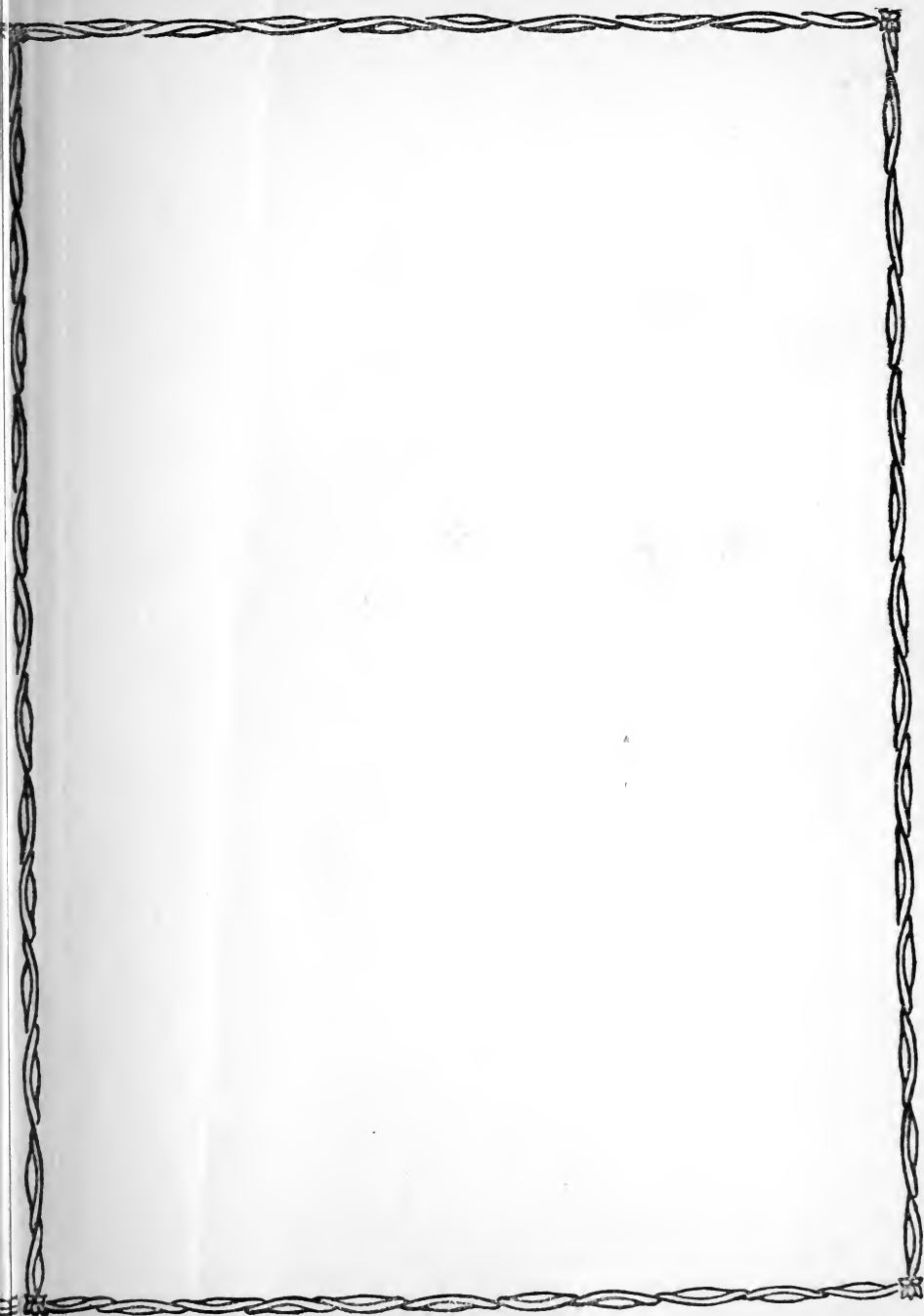


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THE QUEST OF
THE IDEAL

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By Grace Rhys

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I. THE CHARM OF THE WORD

THE word "ideal" is still beautiful, though it is in danger of being horribly misused. It will be a pity if it is cheapened out of existence. I know of none that can take its place. Its roots strike deep into the past. It has grown up like a lily from an immemorial world. It is one of the fairest things among us and very nearly the most valuable.

✿ Perhaps we shall appreciate it more if we call up some of its companions, if we can glance backwards at its origin; but it is no easy matter to get at the real source. When did the first faint conception of a possible ideal arise in any mind? Can any one surprise the moment of the capture of an idea,

of the birth of a word: what is a thought before it is thought?

☼ Phantoms arise, formless, blown like smoke along the far horizons of the mind. Day by day, night after night, the mind pursues the half-seen chase; a shadowy huntsman following a shadowy stag where hunter and hunted and forest are one. At last one mind more powerful than the rest, sees more clearly, and hunts more swiftly; the idea is grasped, a name is fixed upon it, and the world has a new word for its use; the mind of the world is the wiser by a thought.

☼ Who can say how old is the Greek word *εἶδω*, to perceive, to know?

☼ Less old is the Greek word *ιδέα*, an idea, form, appearance; which, unlike our English equivalent, may mean the appearance of a thought within the borders of the mind, or of form without; "that which is perceived," in fact; either without as form, or within, as thought. It is well to keep the interchangeable nature of both these appearances clearly before the mind. Thought is form of a kind. Form often springs from thought. Here we begin to perceive the birth-right of

the strong mind upon whose movements wait the multiplicities of form.

✿ *εἶδος* is another of these words, not very different in its meaning from *idea*. *εἰδωλον* is likewise a kindred word; first it meant a phantom; an appearance which had no real existence, then it was by a curious twist of the mind fastened on the solid reflection of a false idea of the divine Spirit,—an idol.

✿ These are fine words; there is music in the sound of them, the music of the Spring-time of the mind. They have the sound of breaking chains, of the bursting of the sheath. From them we learn the ages-old action of the human mind at its greatest moments.

✿ It was probably Plato who gave us our earliest conception of the ideal. He had a notion of a perfect pattern of everything earthly subsisting somewhere in a heavenly country. He first put in words what we all feel and know.

✿ And we owe him a debt; and we owe the poor misused word a debt. For the belief in a fixed good, not seen, but pictured as existing across the borders of the seen and contrasting with its misery or futility is one of

the most powerful weapons ever put into the hand of man.

II. THE PARADISAIC DREAM

✿ THE ideal first sprang into life from the contact with pain on one hand and beauty on the other; with one added ingredient which I shall mention later on.

✿ Did some fearful pterodactyl, flying against the sunset in the effort to escape from another swifter than he, dream of a warm and gorgeous atmosphere where horrible combats would be no longer a necessity of his life? Did a wounded brontosaurus thundering in his swamp, dream, as he lifted his head from the mud, of placid lakes where unharmed he might trumpet to his mate and she to him? Paradise is always compounded of the finest moments of life as it is known and experienced by the dreamer.

✿ At first, while man was in his wild state, when the earth was untamed and the other creatures were mightier than he, his life was a state of fear, a state it is difficult for us to have any conception of. The rabbit hunted by the weasel knows it; so does the small bird under the shadow of the hawk. Out of this

state Man had to rise by his own savage effort. By killing and slaying and mastering the earth, that old fierce and tormented one has gained a measure of peace for his kind. But it is along this fearful path men have come: the dream has been hard to rescue, hard to hold by, in a world ruled by blood and lust and fear.

✿ Our more gentle ideals were impossible in that old world. Men fashioned their heavens out of the best moments they knew. Remember those Northern warriors who lived by slaughter, who came out of their frosty north, terror running before them, and blood behind. Their heaven was pictured as a dark hall where they might sit drinking strong mead from the skulls of their enemies. And yet these terrible ones were the sons of God as well as we; they knew the love of mate and child; they felt the Breath within the soul; they lived between the splendour of the waves and the blue tent of the open sky.

✿ The Turkish Heaven is not a much better place, less fierce, more sensual: set the paradise of the cold north against the paradise of the warm south; the enemy's skull against the plump houri, and choose between if you
5 ✿ can.

can. Better than either appears the Indian's dream of the wide prairie and the happy hunter. All the primitive heavens are built on these models. The paradise of the prairie flower would be the silent rolling sea of flower and leaf with neither stamping hoof nor rending teeth to come next or nigh. The paradise of hoof and horn would be the wide green world vexed neither by hunter nor beast of prey. The paradise of the hunter includes the travail of the herd.

III. THE RULER OF THE DREAM

THE dream of Paradise was begotten, was it not, of pain on the one hand and joy on the other. But there was a third greater contributing cause, one that is an eternal puzzle to express; it is at once the oldest thing in life and the most elusive; the most hackneyed, the least understood; the most familiar, the most mysterious; the most talked about, the least regarded; and that is the Source of Inspiration, the Feeder of the Soul. None of us, not the deepest spirited, understand it. No one can explain it, though temples innumerable have been built to house it and millions of men's lives have been spent in

discoursing of it. Still the mystery hangs there, our chiefest concern, our chiefest delight, incomprehensible always, always adored.

❀ What is it, whence is it, this wonder? How many names have been given to it, both on this star and on many another? Om, Allah, Zeus, Spiritus Sanctus, The First Cause, The Light Eternal, The Word. By this and many and other strange names men have tried to express this light and law: countless millions of women and men have attempted to explore its nature and faculties; they have tied it up tight in creeds and books; they have leaped on their altars and cried and cut themselves, ay and other people too, with knives; and the mystery still hangs there, unthinkable, not to be imprisoned, in nature and faculties always the same.

❀ Always the same: the same as it broods over the plunging of the fiery gulfs of the far suns; the same as it lights the staggering beetle to its food along the moss; the same on the waste moor and in the crowded church; the same upon the forehead of the Saint and on this earth before ever a man was.

❀ It was the dim perception of the presence

❀ of

of this Spirit that began to enter into and colour people's notions of paradise. It must evidently rule there since the earth was not without it. Those who understand nature know that the green kingdoms of the earth live under this law: that the footprints of the Unknowable One are to be found along the fields and in the wood, when they are missed from the dwellings of men. That is why the shepherd on the hills, the old wife at her cottage door, the negro in the cotton field, sometimes collect a pure wisdom more valuable than the deliberate intelligence of books.

☼ Therefore since this irrefutable Law reigns over the earth, animating the least vital, and leaping into glory in the most splendid moments of its most splendid creatures, how should Paradise be without that sweetness, better than honey to the simple soul?

IV. THE LABOURER

☼ THE Idealist stands with feet planted in the original clay from which he sprang. Above him is his dream. In his heart is a desire more or less strong to bring the actual into some likeness of the dream. The tool that is to shape out in this intractable earth

the ideal conscience at the root of him and thus connect the two is nothing but his will and his right hand. As a man fashions a garden out of rough ground, so must the idealist seize upon the material of life that is nearest to him; so that at long last his eyes may look on what the eyes of his soul have beheld from the beginning. This is creator's work, tremendous work, for the raw material of life is stubborn and rude and hard;—rude and hard enough to have broken many and many a great heart. Magnificent as they are, the laws that bind and shape this raw material of life are rude and hard also.

❁ Which of us that has eyes to see and the power of thought but has staggered at that first law that life feeds on life? So terrible is it that men have covered it up and cloaked it, hiding it away from themselves and each other. Not one in a hundred dares to face it; each of us has his own brightly coloured screen, painted all over with impossible and beautiful designs, to put up to hide the truth.

❁ The true idealist is he who does not fear the truth, who takes the bitterest truth as the salted bread between his teeth and gets nourishment thereby.

❧ How can the gardener turn the waste to blossom unless he knows of the frost and the tempest, the blight and the worm?

❧ So must the idealist ponder well the whole picture of his dream, and the nature of his materials before he can get to work. The more widely he can cast his thought, the more sane and firm will his ideals be. The more thorough his knowledge, the less will be his fear of failure.

❧ We see then what enormous qualities the quest of the Ideal demands to-day;—a purity and a devotion to the dream as absolute as that of the heroes of the San Graal, a power of clear thought that shrinks from no truth, that seeks everywhere the essences of things, that examines the nature and properties of those appearances that make up his surroundings: and besides, a strong right hand and the will to labour in obedience to the Law that commands the creation of order and beauty.

V. THE GARDEN

❧ I HAD almost said that the will to labour and the power of the will, were the best qualities of the idealist; forgetting that they must always come second to the imaginative powers

of the soul. But even in this kingdom of the soul little is to be got without labour.

❁ Call the Soul a garden as they do on the backs of the prayer books and then look how heavy is the work. There is the soil full of ugly primitive worms and grubs and horned things struggling up from below. How must Will the Gardener bend and stoop and hoe and scratch to keep under these primitive appearances! There are the flowers, the lovely virtues, all in rows, shedding a sweet savour; how soon they wilt and wither and the blossoms fall; what great knowledge must the Gardener have of their natures and how untiringly must he tend them. There are the weeds with their inevitable secret growth; God knows how a whole crop may spring up in the heart of a morning. There is the rain; alas for our tears, but alas for the dry heart that has never known a sorrow. There is the awful mystery of the recurring visits of the sunlight:—the flowers stretching towards it through the night and spreading their cups in the morning. Without it they are not, because of it they are. How did the bud know as it slept through the darkness that in the morning it would be blest?

❧ When the mysterious sunlight and the good soil and the hand of the Gardener have done their work and rendered fruitful the garden of the Soul,—why then the work of the idealist is only beginning.

❧ As the engraver cuts the well imagined picture into steel or copper, so must the idealist reproduce in the clay on which he stands,—in stones and mortar and flesh and blood, the features of his dream.

VI. ON THE MANIPULATING OF MATTER BY SPIRIT

❧ THERE is a relation between the paradisaic dream and the crude terrors of the material life; the link is the desire of the human creature to realise the dream within the limits of his material conditioning. The happy man is he who is able to shape out a course for his thought and actions which is fitted to bring about an agreement between Heaven and earth,—fitted to induce the dream to take up its abode within the bondage of matter.

❧ The unhappy man is he who fails;—perhaps through some lack of judgment or faculty or pure strength. A greater than Sam-

son is wanted for this fight, in which God Himself is so often worsted.

❧ For if there is one thing but too patent, it is that matter is capable of choking spirit; that Spirit has an almost insuperable difficulty in controlling matter. With her soft breath and tenuous hands the soul labours at her tremendous task of creating order and beauty out of chaos: often, too often the breath is sighed away, and hardly a line or mark is left to tell she has been there. For long enough spirit has been struggling in the grip of matter; here and there emerging in a great and noble intelligence, continually thrust back and held down.

❧ How much spirit was there in the matter of the plecthyosaurus as he crawled on to the mud bank to lie in the sun? Consider the patience of the Mighty One who presided at his birth. What of the infant born yesterday into a slum to which the mud of the reptile is a garden—born to a stricken mother and a hypothetical father; no room indeed for it and no such gentle receptacle as a manger; an old black cloth for all its swaddling clothes. Consider the patience of the Mighty One who presides at that birth also! How much

chance has that small being of conquering the varieties of matter by which it is surrounded, and of emerging into an ideal world?

✿ There is infinite value in such spectacles for us; no true thing is ever shirked or put away in the dark that does not breed a rotten spot in thought and a corresponding feebleness of life.

✿ If spirit is here overwhelmed, and the idealists are the soldiers of the Spirit, the more need for their swords.

✿ If once the doctrine of an Omnipotence that could shape matter and life at will, and does not, were overthrown, how freely might you breathe! How freely act! We have done with the idea of an Omnipotent who might and could help and cure but will not. No more can the unhappy curse God and die. The responsibility is now transferred.

✿ We the ungrateful ones! We the sinners! We the blind! We the deaf who have stopped our ears to the music of the heavenly command that bids us live for Service! We the cold hearted that leave the Blessed One to suffer and die afresh each day in our hideous streets and lanes!

✿ Gone the Hebrew ideal of the Angry Je-

hovah fighting and smiting and breaking his enemy's teeth at random!

❀ Gone the mediæval Almighty, with his inscrutable code of morals, afflicting the innocent with misery, pains, and diseases, and for their good!

❀ The problems solved that gave many of us a wet pillow before morning!

❀ All the world as a field of action when each man and woman and child stands forth as a helper in the new old crusade!

❀ Consider then how bright a responsibility falls into the hand of man.

❀ Loud and very loud the voice of the Beautiful One has been preaching in our ears; only a few of us have moved at all in answer. With many-coloured and many-shaped beauties He drapes every foot of earth, every hedge and ditch side. We answer by defiling His earth with hideous erections and stupid uncleanness. He allows every one of us a share in His own creator spirit and many of us answer by creating vileness.

❀ Think of the joy of heart of each child born into the splendour of the new ideal. Every one with the love of the Unseeable One in his heart, every one with the love of his

fellow men, every one with a sword of light in his hand to liberate the Good Spirit of order and grace, to work in the service of this Spirit till the earth blooms as a garden.

✿ Even now any one can see how fast is the advance; it is certain that we are growing daily more powerful in dealing with matter. The angels of life have now at their disposal an electric current that thrills round the Earth. When this weapon is in the hands of the great ones great things will come into being.

✿ Great things are being done to-day. I have seen a clear spirit, grown powerful, shining like a sun, smoothing out the most difficult life, bringing marvels to light about it;—shape after shape of beauty rising up around it in ever increasing circles that grew finally world-wide.

✿ It seems as though no limit could be set to the operations in matter of the powerful soul.

VII. CONDUCTORS OF THE IDEAL

✿ ALL the lovers of heavenly things know that there is a moment when illumination

comes as suddenly, passing as quickly as a bird that crosses the sky. There is no question but that these moments of inspiration are, to those who have known them, the greatest good in life. They bring ecstasy, which means simply a getting out of the body.

✿ Any one who has felt this ecstasy in either a greater or a lesser degree must desire to experience it again; for this reason all the avenues to the ideal are explored.

✿ Which are these avenues? Music is one. Painting another. Poetry. Wine perhaps? Or a fine day. Or a child's face. Boehme found his vision of heaven in a pewter plate. "Sitting one day in his room his eye" (Boehme the shoemaker's) "fell on a burnished pewter dish which reflected the sunshine with such marvellous splendour, that he fell into an inward ecstasy and it seemed to him that he could now look into the principles and deepest foundations of things. He believed that it was only a fancy and in order to banish it from his mind went out upon the green. But here he remarked that he gazed into the very heart of things, the very herbs and grass, and that actual nature harmonised with what he had inwardly seen. He said nothing about

this to any one, but praised and thanked God in silence."

❀ We cannot all have the insight of a Boehme, and see Paradise in a pewter plate; but we all of us can know ecstasy, even heavenly ecstasy and many and many are the roads by which we see it. For pure ecstasy brings wisdom, knowledge and peace.

❀ Men have built churches in order to capture this ideal vision; all the resources of architecture, colour, light, sound and even perfume have been ransacked to this end. Along these many paths all converging to one point the vision comes to many.

❀ Others find that the divine voice is silent for them in the midst of so much human art and artifice. They leave the church with its linking arches and painted shadows, its incense and singing of boys and strive to make their souls in night and darkness, on the hill-side, by the sea, or in the still room. Others again seek this light in the eyes of their fellow men; in the hearts and the lives and the intellects of men they find the highest expression of all forms of life; and in the service of the ideal in mankind they lose and find themselves.

❧ Some seek the vision of the Graal by the road of the cultivation of the inner self; everything goes down before that tremendous pre-occupation—homely life and love and simple ways, all appetite, joys of the senses, claims of their fellow men: nothing matters to them but the call that resounds through the emptied spaces of their souls.

❧ Set against these the men who search for the ideal by the road of the senses. There is many a cruel lover who tests and tries and flings away hearts who in some dim blind way is searching for the one pure gem that he has figured to himself in his dreams. There are some who even in their lust are seekers; strange and contradictory as that may seem.

❧ There is another sort still who have been in love with an imagined beauty and break their hearts because the primitive laws of life are so fierce, so much at war with the features of their dream. These are the people of large hearts, brains and appetites who are strong enough to shake off traditions of thought, keen enough to see the limitations of reality, not strong enough of will and not wise enough to devise a means of bringing the two, the ideal thought and the obstinate material of

life, into harmony. These are the sort who are always hoping for an imagined good by the road of excess; who fly to the never ending and quite certain consolation of satisfying their appetites; certain at least as long as their appetites last. How many of this sort have not used whisky as a refuge from thought? That drunken woman with her hat on one side, that man rolling home and singing as he goes, they may be idealists at heart; neither you nor I can tell.

✿ It is a wise man that can say where appetite ends and the search for the ideal begins. The fact is, there is no division. Nose, tongue, hand, eye and ear; ay and the whole body; such are the roads by which the divine comes to man. There is no getting out of the body—for long, at least. The more necessary that it should be clean: that a seal should be set upon each gateway, that the Blessed One may not falter at any entrance, nor be turned away at the doors.

VIII. THE BASIS OF THE IDEAL

A Chapter not to be read in a drawing-room

✿ CAN it be that the mediæval hell was a more philosophic idea than it has of late

gained credit for? It seems to have expressed something that we try to leave out; it expressed the terror of life, the central fires, the split lightning in the hand of Jove.

❧ We live a strange life nowadays; we are huddled together in our massed cities, protected from Nature's boldness by our clever inventions; so it comes that we are apt to forget the hole of the pit whence we are digged. We like to think of Nature and the God in Nature as something pitiful, gentle and serene as a good woman ordering her house. But the laws of Nature are not so; it is right that we should know it.

❧ It is good for us sometimes to detach ourselves from the every-day conditions of our daily life, to look down into the roots and foundations of our being and our thoughts. A down pillow and a screen—is that what we are wanting; or is it a glimpse of the truth; sweet or bitter, what matter so it be the truth? It is good for us to have all our down pillows snatched away and to be forced from a warm fireside out into the open air, even if it is to face the rain and the storm.

❧ The divine Beatrice went down into hell; so should we all for a season, for heaven rests

upon hell of a sort. Our very peace and our ideals depend upon the balance of turbulent forces. The sunlight by which we live is an emanation from an appalling and unthinkable chaos of flame.

❁ When we look at the welter out of which we have risen, we see man then for what he is, the most cruel, lustful and bloody of all the beasts; and wonder of wonders the most godlike too.

❁ Many men and most women would rather not look on these things at all. Their creed is that the evil that is not spoken of, is not there. They will sin as it were behind the hand. The good women who do not sin, pretend they know nothing. They have even elevated their determined ignorance into a virtue.

❁ To these good women one might say that Beatrice still shone in hell, that she emerged thence more lovely and more wise. A fig for drawing-room pretences. It is as though our city fathers were too pure-minded to look into the city sewers; and the consequences, moral and physical, might make a match of it. No; we cannot be wise unless we look at life as a whole. The more the boundaries of our con-

sciousness are enlarged, the saner becomes our attitude towards life; the more wisely we shall deal with the seething of the life force that goes on at our doors, and within them.

❧ All this our modern existence tends to suppress. How many a hot young man has been driven from his home by the too much bread and milk, by the ignoring of the world, the flesh and the devil whose voices are roaring in his ears.

❧ As four walls and a lighted hearth will shut out night, storm and cold, so does our soft primness seek to cover away the turbulence of life.

❧ Revolt, rage, lust, fear and pain, they are all there; the counterparts in the soul of the grim forces of the universe. Governed and ordered, they become strength, energy, agility, rapidity, beauty; and at the last, peace.

❧ We are the children of mystery, born of the mud and the fiery sun. There is no peace for us save the peace of balanced forces.

❧ It is difficult to express exactly what I mean. What could be more peaceful than a summer evening of sunshine? Yet look what enormities of force and fire and headlong motion have brought it about.

✿ What could be quieter than the peace of a saintly face? But that too is builded upon central fires. What you see there is the chained energy of potential outbreakings and storms; that peace is the more lucent because of the primal force on which it rests.

✿ The great man is he whose passions have learned to sit as quiet as the eagle at the feet of Jove. The ruling woman is she who guides the men of her house by scarcely perceptible motions. Knowing the power of the forces of life, having governed her own soul, she governs others by a smile.

IX. ON CONSCIENCE

✿ THE question of conscience is curiously related to the ideal. What is it, this thing we call conscience? What is it that smites us this hard blow when we have been false to our own code of right? Watch your sensations when you have done or said an unwise, even ever so slightly cruel thing: tell me then if something does not strike a blow at your heart, sickening you, half-stopping your breath, punishing you till you have repented and made good your fault. Who is it strikes the blow? Who is it holds the whip?

❧ Children suffer under the strokes of this tormentor. I remember a kind father forgiving a troublesome little chap of three. He patted his back and said, "There now, you will be father's good little boy?" "No, no," said the child, bursting into a passion of tears, and throwing himself into his father's arms: "No, no! It's dada's naughty, wicked little boy." This thing of three had already his own private ideals and wept to find himself falling short.

❧ The interesting fact is that the bold fellow who drives you with his whip is just as fallible as can be: he is always making mistakes; often he lets you off when you have been doing what other people can see is wrong: all the while you and your foolish conscience have been as happy as possible together. Not only is he a stupid fellow, requiring to be educated, but he is also a very simple fellow; you yourself can pet and handle and delude him; put him and his whip to sleep with false promises, bad reasoning, and other narcotics. There he will lie and drowse and sicken and give you scarcely any trouble unless fear comes to wake him.

❧ On the other hand, I have known good
25 ❧ people,

people, the saints of the earth, cherishing a great bloated overgrown conscience. This monster has ruled their every moment with a rod of iron; reduced them to a diet of bread and fruit, and forced them little by little into an active and suffering sainthood.

✿ That is what a pampered conscience does. It becomes a clumsy monster who will know no bounds and no excuses. It will work you like the stoker of an engine. It will strip you of your fine linen and your outer garment, and drive you at last upon the arms of a cross.

✿ And after all, why not? Better any anguish than the slow suffocation of ease.

X. THE WEAPONS OF IDEALISM

✿ THE Real and the Ideal! What harm has been done by this senseless antithesis! The Ideal is by far the realest thing on earth, as political economists and statesmen are beginning to find out through their mistakes.

✿ All the people who live for noble ends, the great people of the earth, are idealists. It is they who have the gift to divine the uses and properties of matter, who see through it and beyond it and all around it by means of its properties, and control it to great ends.

✿ Give stones and mortar to an idealist who has had the force and will to learn their uses and the control of them and he will build you a cathedral. His idealism will give the mere rough material of his trade a value which is not to be measured. Give the same material to the cunning man of small brain, to the man who is called the practical man, and he will build you a hideous street, cheating as he goes, in which his lack of real practical sense is manifest, because, in flat disobedience to the commands of his Creator, he is creating an unremunerative ugliness, when remunerative beauty might have better rewarded him. Bricks and stones have often been the weapons of the idealist, and will be so once more in the future.

✿ Colour and line are other ideal weapons. Give a blank wall to one who has had force of will to learn the control and the use of colour and he will present you with the glories of the imagination. The human creature who is all appetite and no imagination will decorate it for you with foul words; which wall of the two will have the most real existence, that adorned with the ejaculations of appetite or that which speaks the language of the soul?

They are both real; as the thrush and the woodlouse may haunt the same tree; and by that I mean no disrespect to the woodlouse, who is a clever enough little beast in his way, as you will soon see if you tickle him with a straw.

❁ Science is one of the strongest weapons of the idealist. All the greatest scientists have been and are idealists; they have great and clear imaginations that can leap at the living principle behind appearances, and work upon that. Galileo was not the only one of them who lived and died for an ideal. What saint, what poet has ever had a greater imagination than Tyndall? Was ever truth more nobly expressed than by him? With a little gas and a few yards of tubing, his singing flame will tell you some of the deepest secrets of the universe. And there are one or two of his sort alive to-day.

❁ These are only a few of the weapons of idealism; there are a thousand others. I should weary of cataloguing them. Smiles, tears, laughter, good cookery, humour, cold water, sunlight, common sense, yes, and carbolic. On the subduing weapon of love I cannot even touch, so mighty a mystery is it,

as broad and deep as the ocean and much more incomprehensible. I will only mention one more, one whose power and importance warrants me in dealing with it separately.

XI. MONEY

❁ MONEY is one of the chief weapons of idealism. The Latin authors said that the Druids sold places in the other world in return for money. That is a very suggestive bit of scandal. Possibly it is partly true; after all why should not one visit the nearest apparent Guardians of Paradise with treasure?

❁ Money in those far-away times was a much purer and simpler thing than it is to-day. It was a symbol of labour; whether the hard labour of fighting or the quieter labour of the fields or the highly-prized labour of the smith, the artist in metals or in embroidered clothing.

❁ Those who sacrificed the fruit of such effort in symbol at the doors of the unknown were by no means fools of their own invention. All true labourers do, in one way or another, so offer their labours; why, the very rascals of commerce who have shorn their brothers and sisters as close as a June flock in spite of helpless baaings—when they have

heaped up their pile of fleeces as high as the stars, so that all men gape upon it with open mouths, are they not constrained to make an offering to the ideal which in spite of them lurks in the background of their thought? These offerings may take the shape of hospital wards, churches, gold jugs and basins presented for the Almighty's use, parks, libraries and other public institutions.

✿ In so far as such things are precipitations of personal vanity they are simply curious. Probably there is mixed up with this motive a concession to their own still surviving sense of the best; and also a concession to other people's ideals, for which they still have a respect which is almost fear.

✿ Now arises the question: can a gift of tainted money brought by impure hands turn to good? The more one puzzles over this question, the more complex and difficult it appears. Money is certainly an impersonal thing: if you or I steal a sixpence that sixpence is just the same as any other, yet should we expect what is called "a blessing" with it? Yet it would be quite a healthy sixpence if passed on to any one else.

✿ Perhaps tainted money in impure hands

never can quite be a sword of light. Some unsavoury flavour will hang about the jug and basin, the park, the library or the statue and what not: there will be something in the mode of giving, some lack of a true equation between the thing given and those to whom it is given, or else a fault in the manner of giving, that will stamp the gift and keep it from thriving.

❧ On the other hand, I do believe that tainted money in pure and innocent hands used for ideal ends can become extraordinarily powerful. Remember that all money is a symbol of effort or labour of some kind; any creature who has money is as if it were possessed of a little army of goblin hands which can be set to work both fast and well on any task their master chooses;—to work with a goblin cleverness too, far in excess of any qualities owned by their master.

❧ He or she who has money then is possessed of a talisman as powerful as the ring or the lamp of the Arabian Nights' tale; with this difference, that the talisman is a more delicate one than is told of in any marvellous tale.

❧ This is its virtue; when held in the hand of the owner it takes the colour of the heart;

it turns to a poisonous mass, exhaling an evil odour, in the hand of the vicious; it turns to trash in the hand of the fool; it shines a long-rayed star of powerful emanations in the hand of him who loves his fellow-men.

XII. SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

❀ ONE day I happened to find myself among a little group of people on a winter afternoon. The talk ran presently on a woman known to us all, whose husband was openly and repeatedly unfaithful and quite indifferent to her; yet the woman still clung to her uncomfortable position as his wife. "It is extraordinary," said one of the party, "how a woman of her intelligence can be contented to take the shadow and leave the substance."

❀ I felt curious at once to see how such a remark would be taken; glancing round, at each face in turn, I saw that no one had misunderstood. There was neither hesitation nor questioning on any face.

❀ Here was an extraordinary thing; such a paradox to be taken as a commonplace among people who made no parade of religion or higher thought!

❁ What was the interpretation of that remark?

❁ That love is substance; that such things as income, houses, silver forks and motor cars may be shadows: real enough if they stand for the real things, otherwise valueless.

❁ That is to say that the spiritual is the one reality, the material is the reflection.

❁ And to say that people accept such a wild notion for a rule of life!

❁ How many of us look at solid things as shadows and seek for the spirit of which they are the projections? How many of us know only those solid shadows, those affluent projections?

❁ How many of us but would hurry to the potter's field and pick up those thirty pieces of silver to put them in the bank?

Pecunia non olet; "Money has no smell." Is not that a respectable doctrine? And how many subscribe to it?

❁ On the other hand there are very many people who hold half unconsciously the other faith, wild and transcendental as it looks when written down: good comfortable people and unreflecting, perhaps over-valuing their possessions, yet holding to the right by instinct,

for whom the sun would lose its light, and life lose all its value if they were forced into cruelty or dishonour in order to keep their hold of those possessions. In such a case as that, a dining-room table may be the pleasant projection of a man's sunny goodwill towards his kind. In another and a worse case you may have the same class of table, *quâ* legs and finish, and yet no better thing than an altar to a belly god.

✿ It is the spirit that animates the table that really counts.

✿ It is the animating spirit that counts everywhere. One of the things that have most staggered reflecting people, from David onward, is the apparent success of the unrighteous. The lovers of the concrete, the worshippers of the material for its own sake, the masters and mistresses of the art of grab, how they get on!

✿ Well, let them! Why should you, oh good man! oh good woman! covet their festering rubbish heaps? Do you know the venom generated by a great pile of ill-gotten fermenting money? Moreover before you complain of the success of the unrighteous, you have to be quite sure that your man is what

you take him for. He may have a quite beautiful vein of virtue in him that sweetens the whole lump. For instance, I have seen the worshipper of the material for its own sake succeed and flourish; but when I have looked carefully into his case, I have found that he has been an idealist somewhere: perhaps a devoted husband and father; and with a motive that has seemed pure to himself he has wrung the hearts of others. His dealings with matter, which for the sake of the creatures beloved by him he has learned to control, have been masterly. Perhaps his sole fault has been that he has worn a pair of moral blinkers, that he has made the mistake of confounding spirit and matter (one often made by political economists who should be wise) and has taken and pounded the hearts and the souls and the lives of his brothers and sisters in his mortar along with the rest!

✿ And in any case, why should you, oh brother, oh sister, with your hands full of lilies and roses, honey on your tongue, and the far music of a dream in your ears, vex your souls because of a cock crowing on a dunghill?

XIII. THE BEAUTIFUL WAY

❁ QUITE poor and apparently unimportant people sometimes have a large influence. In small ways they are great. The large spirit grown powerful through exercise may be able to deal freely with life and with matter, and bring about great results:—most of us have to be content with small things. But even in the doing of the smallest thing there lurks a wonderful efficacy and sweetness, if only it be done in a Beautiful Way. I have met people who never talked about an ideal, and who would be frightened at the notion of entertaining one, who yet had a beautiful way of doing things.

❁ Simple things done beautifully have the gift of becoming translucent. They acquire a large significance.

❁ You can light a fire and tend a hearth in such a way that it becomes a symbol of all the lighted hearts in the world.

❁ You can place food on a table in such a way that those whom you serve are thrice fed.

❁ You can put clothes on as cleanly and as fairly as the rose clothes itself in June.

❁ I have seen a woman bid good day to a shop-assistant in such a way as to spill a radi-

ance on the counter, and bring depths of sweetness and hills of peace before the worker's eyes. Why there is even a way of rebuking that generates love.

❀ There are creatures so endeared of heaven that all they do is lovely and smacks of the country of their dreams. Not all of us are dear to heaven, and our self-conscious efforts after the Beautiful Way may be ludicrous to other folk; but if we persist in our efforts something will pierce through our clumsiness.

❀ The light that shines at the wick of a tallow candle is made of fire and related to the light of sacred lamps.

❀ Even if you have to cook pies or sit on a high stool doing accounts you can do it in an extraordinary way. A sort of flavour will hang about you and your pies and your accounts. At odd moments those who come in contact with you will have glimpses of those deep seas of light where your daily ablutions are performed.

XIV. ON THE FORMING OF IDEALS

❀ ONE might almost say that there are as many different kinds of idealists as there are people

people;—that there are as many ideals as there are souls.

❁ What is the ideal of life for you and me?

❁ There is not one common to us both; there are a few broad points on which we can meet, but my set of working ideals would hardly do for you, nor yours for me. Yours might be too complicated for me, mine too impractical for you. The essence of this thing we call the ideal is that it should be a pictured image or a series of pictured images of life; a sort of triple extract of human conclusions concerning the forms and appearances of things, boiled down and reduced to theory. As a matter of fact all of us harbour an endless series of working ideals relating to things within and without the mind; for instance I have my own notion of a perfectly darned sock; of what blackberry jam should be; and what, a sequence of ideas. You too have a storehouse of such samples of perfection which you are eternally turning over and taking out for use.

❁ When we say that so and so has a high ideal we mean a most complicated and difficult thing; we mean that he is in possession of a whole gallery of beautiful patterns of

thought, language, manners and achievement of all sorts.

❀ The value of such a gallery of ideals depends a good deal on the power and lucidity of the mind that has collected them.

❀ Some people are without sufficient thinking power to evolve an ideal for themselves; as a rule they accept the ideals of the thinkers who have preceded them, under the name of religion. A good thing that they do. Who wants the conclusions of a fool upon folly? The ready-made code is safe and sure. The fresh waters of spring may well run in the noble old courses.

❀ But if we are to be of real value we must reflect:—reflect with passion and with truth; nothing is to be accepted; everything is to be examined; so fast do new forms of life evolve that last year's virtue must appear in a different trim to-day and take another weapon in her hand. The love of the supreme good and of our fellow men may yet drive us on to strange thoughts and deeds, unthinkable and undoable in the long ago.

❀ We have said that the idealist stands with his dream above him and his feet in the mud. Between the two are the hands that must bring

the intractable clay into some likeness of the heaven he has conceived. As time goes on and his labours go on, the clay takes unexpected shapes about him, some beautiful, some ugly and mean. His dream too alters with the years. He wants now to remedy some of his mistakes; he wants to embody some of the new features of his dream. He himself alters with the years. So it is that our ideals must be elastic, we must be ever ready to deal with fresh circumstances. The old ways may be better than the new ways; but the new ways may have some seed of betterment, of progression in them that the old ways lacked. To be rigid is generally to be wrong. We may want new laws to fit a whole nation full of a new sort of people.

❀ We shall never be right till we have reconsidered our ideals.

❀ We shall never get right till we have ceased to believe in the Victorian clever man's principle that men might be used as machines.

❀ We shall never get right till the human babe becomes for us sacro-sanct;—whether its father be saint or sinner, whether he choose to forsake it or no.

❀ We shall never get right till natural law,

and not the male, is left to determine the relative functions of man and woman.

✿ We shall never get right till we have formed a national ideal of responsibility to the earth's surface beginning with such trifles as ginger-beer bottles and paper-bags and ending up with battle-fields, railway companies and slums.

✿ We shall never get right till we have a new Doomsday Book of the towns of the country written out fairly for all men to read.

✿ We shall never get right till we have a new international ideal. The world has had enough of the morals of the public-school boy in the diplomatist's coat. The day when the "cannon's flesh" rises up and refuses its destiny will be a great day in the history of mankind.

✿ Meantime we had all better cultivate elasticity of mind, which includes tolerance, without which our ideals may become mere rods to whip each other's backs.

XV. MATERIAL OF THE IDEALIST

✿ ALL that is of real value to a life proceeds from within outwards. No beauty, riches, honours, are of real import to any unless the soul within is beautiful, rich and honour-

able enough to enter into correspondence with its opportunities. You cannot give any living creature that which has no relation to himself. You cannot give a burglar the Divina Commedia. You cannot give the National Gallery to a procuress. You cannot give a sunrise to a cardsharp. You cannot give human souls in charge to a person who hasn't got one. ❀ You cannot give cities in charge to men of no wider view than the mole who only sees his own little underground path.

❀ When the devil wanted to show Christ the kingdoms of the world, he took him up to the top of a high mountain. Let any one who wishes to see what the kingdoms of the world look like to-day, climb to the highest accessible point in the heart of a great city.

❀ Get up to the top of St. Paul's and behold London. Look over that vast heaving sea; before you have looked long you will be ready to confess the powerlessness of man to control the destinies of men.

❀ There it lies, a living ocean:—house roofs peaked like ranks of ocean waves. What man's eye or hand wrought these things or brought these masses together? It was no man at all. The strongest of us and the most

intentionate are but livelier instruments of far travelling forces, whose beginning and whose ending no one knows.

❧ On such an eminence as this all rancours drop away: what large matters are these men's pigmy foulness, those men's pigmy tyrannies and hates? We are in the presence of vital impulses which have whirled men into a centre as the streaming nebulae are whirled. Such a spectacle as this is one of those evolutions which are as independent of the will as the massed movements of birds, the westward and eastward movement of crowded humanity, the crusades, the necessity that covers the sea with ships and sends men crawling to the top of high mountains and the poles.

❧ The vastness of the thing amazes: what does it portend? Look at that heaving and distracted sea; think of the million children's lives there, stunted and granite-bound. In God's name, what pattern of life can we fit to these people's needs?

❧ Look deep enough, and perhaps it will appear that here in the midst of terrors is the very point of salvation. Here has been formed, independent of any human will, the monster crucible in which the human race is

to be fused and refined. The vast cauldron whirls and seethes and threatens eruption; countless fresh units of life are attracted to it and caught in, there to be fused with the rest.

✿ And the movement is not all centripetal. Already we see the centrifugal tendency counteracting. Having learned what the city has to give, another and quite new race of creatures is flung off on the land. It is not all bad, this huge melting-pot of mankind. There is no need to despair. "Don't look at it from the top downward," said the poet son of a drunken carpenter to me the other day. "Look at it from below upward, if you want to see the light. It becomes glorious then." Glorious it might be to him because his genius had set him free: it is often not very glorious to the others. Yet there was truth in what he said. There is life in that mass. There is a heaving in the lower depths that betokens life. Imponderable shapes and essences float above it, the thoughts and ideals of men, changing always, unrealised as yet.

✿ Moreover the women, for so long submerged and silenced, are beginning to rise; some strong impulsion drives them on; they

are taught by hard lessoning that on them depends the race, that in freedom with good counsel there is health and life; that the sons of slaves share in the mother's abasement; that the soul, the light-giver and leader of the body, faints and corrupts when exposed to ignominy.

✿ Hope is moving the people; now what ideal to set before them to help them to their hope? Here is the raw material of life; raw indeed. There yonder is the excellent pattern of the dream. How can the will and the two hands of the idealist so work upon this mass as to bring the two into some semblance of each other?

✿ But the idealists are at it already, a thousand of them! The miracle will accomplish itself; they, we, can no more help going forward than the stream can help running to the sea. Let us only discern which way the universal current sets, so that we may save ourselves the trouble of swimming up-hill. Go forward we must: and where is the sense of doing it backwards?

✿ Those men who, gripping their property, oppose the advance of social science; those men who oppose the advance of women, re-

mind me of nothing so much as of a he-goat that butts at the edges of a travelling bog.

✿ No; let us sail with the blessed wind and not against it. Give liberty and give bread to soul and body. Let us be rid of the illusion of purely male energy that is without pity, without wisdom, and without love.

✿ For heaven's sake, let us teach the children to be good. We shall bring all the nation into contempt, if we do not. You cannot build up a respectable State on a foundation of rotten units.

✿ Some day we shall come to try the spirit as a weapon. We have never tried it yet. When we do we shall find it to be the true earth shaker, stronger and more persuasive than the cannon or the sword.

✿ The walls of Jericho fell down at the sound of a trumpet; so might the old walls of pride and stupidity fall down round the City of Souls and the flood come in.

✿ Did the wind of the spirit, blowing strongly from the right quarter but gain an entrance, we should all become intelligent enough to believe in the power of simple goodness;—simple private goodness which is the only thing for all of us from the Lord Cham-

berlain down to the knife and boot boy. Not a comfortable soul among us but would be willing to lay down his meal too many and his superfluous bits of shining metal and stone in order to bring light to the myriad eyes of the disinherited children who should be our care.

✿ Not a lazy soul among us but would leave his selfish muddling to help in the labour of regeneration, a work for angels and for gods, incomparably difficult, incomparably great.

XVI. THE REWARDS OF THE IDEAL

✿ I HAVE not lived long enough to watch the generations. I can only record here the result of say twenty intelligent years of observation;—not long enough to entitle one to speak with authority. Still, twenty years make a long enough space in which to come to a conclusion. The conclusion I have come to is that the rewards of the ideal are constant and valuable. At one time I did not think it was so. I was forced during some years to conclude that cunning was the most valuable, the most frequently and richly rewarded of all qualities,—the cunning that is the grand tool

of the appetites; the cunning that knows how to handle men and women and facts, with an unsleeping eye to its own advantage.

❁ Later on when I found Cunning sitting among his gathered sheaves I was not particularly enticed by the quality of the harvest, nor by the flavours that pervaded the harvest field.

❁ On the other hand when I became intelligent enough myself to watch the pilgrimage of a soul living for ideal ends through all the intricacies of shows and appearances that make up our life, I became gradually more impressed. I had seen a good many things: I had seen a dull soul gradually extinguishing the beauty of a noble face and form; form and face growing more opaque and heavy year by year. I had seen a coarse soul, born to every shape and appearance of material beauty, surrounded from birth with all the shows and forms that are for delight,—I had seen that soul make a hell for itself and others out of a Paradise of the senses.

❁ Now I saw a pure soul growing strong, and conquering untoward and difficult surroundings precisely as a man by labour conquers a harsh unfruitful soil. I have watched that soul interpenetrate others, while weaving

about itself continually widening circles of colour and light.

✿ Lastly I saw a fine spirit literally draw afresh the lines of a plain uninteresting countenance.

✿ Have I seen, or do I delude myself in thinking I have seen the child born of the heavenly mind fairer than its parents in body because of their power of thought?

✿ Can fine minds improve a breed or race? Be sure they can.

✿ Other rewards the pursuit of the Ideal brings with it; for one thing it leaves the seekers no time to be lazy minded; the constant falling short, the humiliation, the lapses, the repentance that follows these lapses; the ceaseless effort to discriminate between values and appearances; all this preserves in the mind the agility and suppleness of youth. Mere good-nature or even goodness will not save the soul alive in middle and old age. There is something mental and spiritual that has an exact parallel in stoutness of body; it might be described as a sort of comfortable fuzziness: it ends by smothering the soul in excellent good people sometimes. From this disease the seekers of the ideal are saved; their

search keeps them lively. It sharpens their faculties.

✿ They are like gold-seekers, ransacking every soil for the one pure grain. They gain in the end great skill in discerning the nature of the different soils and rock-veins, in divining where this gold streak is to be found. You can tell idealists by their skill in the objective. To the common mind, what is called a hard fact is something solid, opaque, and final. The common mind has the cleverness of the jackdaw in collecting these solid objects about it.

✿ A "thing" has the same value as a fact, or even more; there it is; see round it if you dare; that red brick house; that motor-car; is not that convincing? See that large lump of gold? Why will you not bob and curtsy to it?

✿ But your idealists will not bob until they have reflected; they want to penetrate these facts, these objects; of what stream of thought, motive, and desire are they the deposit? Whence came they? How came they? Whither are they tending? As we divine the passage of the grinding glacier from the rock-heaps it leaves behind, so do they divine the

courses of the will by the accretion of the solid objects about it. You think to impress the eye of the ideal thinker by a gold chain or a chin or a wrist held high? He will, if his attention happens to be attracted, at once begin to reflect on your symptoms; to analyse the conclusions of the mind that have gone to determine the angle at which your chin or your wrist is held; your gold chain will be like a little scroll of fine writing and read at a glance.

❁ For your true idealist, well trained in the sternest of all schools, has a mind agile beyond description. How long do you think it would take an Emerson to analyse a Rockefeller? Half a look, half a word, the recognition of an atmosphere; and the story is told.

❁ I am talking of course of the great ones, the masters and mistresses who have been long on the road and know every yard of it and all the signs of the weather. To us, who never can hope for such wisdom as theirs, is left the continual attempting and the humiliation that comes of repeated small failures. The great thinkers have their moments of despair; the small ones have no temptation to be anything but humble.

❁ One cannot even say, "Follow your dream and you will be happy." You may be happy, you probably will; but you may not; and in any case that is not quite what you are after, though it generally includes it. Circumstances may be too many for you. But what one can say is, Follow your dream and you will not be sleepy. You will not be old. You will keep a young heart and you will always have plenty to do. Your mind will be agile and increasingly agile, your life fuller and more worth living every day.

❁ These are only a few of the rewards of the ideal; they are really so numerous and extraordinary that one might be all day telling them; the harvest is so rich that one hardly knows where to begin the tale. Perhaps one of the greatest rewards is the increasing value and meaning that one finds in simple things. The assayer of gold will find that they stand the test. The reason seems to me to be that there is a perfection in simplicity that is only beaten by the very topmost perfection in art and scarcely even then. You can have perfect bread and cheese for instance. A perfect French dinner can only be had by very few. Take a boiled egg for another example or a

whitewashed wall; a fine morning; a rose-bush or even a row of peas; for women the pleasure of baking a loaf or making a garment or bathing a child. For men and women the pleasure of making or doing anything really well. There are large meanings in these simple things; the idealist sees them, and reads them in, always more and more; only the male and female fool deride them.

❁ It follows that as the simple things of life grow in beauty and value, so does life itself increase in beauty and significance. This gain the idealist will find he shares with the scientist. Everything is interesting to the scientist certainly, but there are degrees of interest: a yard of hedgerow interests him more than the drawing-room carpet; a patch of the night sky more than the constellations of the shop-window. Our pilgrim on his or her pilgrimage will find just the same sifting of estimates going on in his mind; values will change places; the true things, the eternal things will come to the top; the temporary things go down. Not that we must undervalue the drawing-room carpet and the shop windows. Unless the one is elevated into a fetich and the other into a stage upon which

Folly screams at her top note, they are a natural and interesting part of life. But the pure-hearted woman will not be intoxicated by them as the female materialists are. Nor can the male materialist plume himself on any superiority; his follies may be less gaudy, they may be more impure and as trivial in their way.

❁ Our pilgrim finds himself more and more in love with the simplicities; his wallet grows fuller, but his step is lighter, his eye keener as it glances abroad. Moreover he is getting forward on his journey. This is another of his rewards. There is nothing static in the spiritual quest. There is a delicious sense of moving onward. There are continual fresh horizons appearing. Every point that is passed is like a new stage upon the road.

❁ There is no delight comparable to that of the spiritual life; when I speak of our pilgrim being in love with the simplicities, I do not mean that he will always be hoeing round a rose-bush with his eyes turned up to the stars, on a diet of boiled eggs. What I do mean is that from the simple things of life to the great things is but an easy step. It is a much longer and more toilsome step from the in-

tricacies of a sophisticated life to simple greatness. Cleverness is death to greatness. The business point of view, so called, has been the winding-sheet of many a fine mind. Your true quester, who sees straight in simple things, will see straight on a steep and crooked path that will catch the clever man in a fall. And it is not only in straightness and pureness that your spiritual man gains; power and agility of mind come to him also; and on a higher plane than they come to his clever friend.

❀ One of his most delightful rewards is the good company in which he finds himself. He is one of a confraternity. All the poets are his brethren, so are the great painters and the great musicians. So are the saints, the thinkers of all countries and of all religions: their wisdom is his, their spiritual consolation is his.

❀ Friendships are worth just so much as the stuff they feed upon. Do you drink with your friend? Then your friendship is worth as much and no more than the liquor in the glass. Do you hunt with your friend? Your friendship is worth just so much as a shout across the hill. Do you talk with your friend? Of

what do you talk? Of just that stuff is your love or friendship made. It may be worth no more than a sensual jest: it may be as broad as the seas, as high as the heavens. Let the young lovers know that the ideal is the only safe bond. In the difficult night the youth knows his beloved by the light she carries and she him.

❀ See now where our pilgrim of the soul comes in and pulls off the prize! Of what immortal stuff are his loves and his friendships made! Instead of forming one of a jostling crowd, hungry, selfish, unheeding, he climbs a golden ladder on whose steps he meets with the angels. Along that rising path lie, like summer fragrance, the consolations especially needed by sensitive souls in these stormy days when the robust progeny of old, dead sins are becoming so formidable. The idealist finds in his creed a continual encouragement to keep going on. He sees, even in events that are untoward and cruel a principle of progression. Above the slums of Wapping and the acres of chimney-tops he can see the apple-trees of the Isles of the Blest, the spires of a new city of the children of men. He can even foretell the new state whose conditioning

is in accord with the creative rhythms of the universe.

✿ As for himself, he has no fear and no uneasiness. A crust is good enough for him. A whitewashed room is a paradise. His companions are the glorious company of the apostles. Even death and the judgment are his old friends. Nay, death may appear to him as a veiled lover, into whose arms he runs!





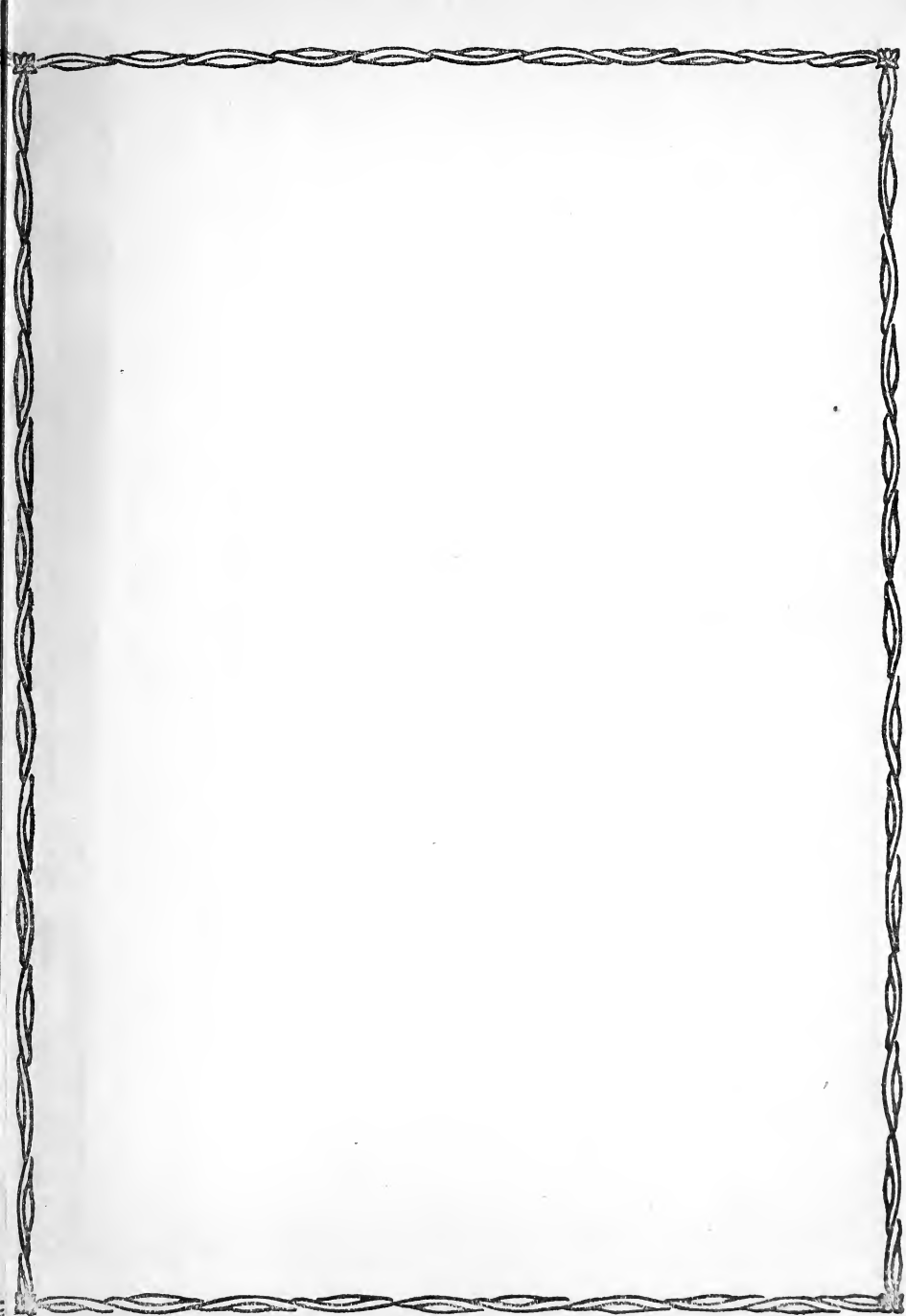


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